

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 551
By Henry

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Vice Admiral William
Porter Lawrence of Nashville.

WHEREAS, *"Oh Tennessee, my Tennessee*
What love and pride I feel for thee.
You proud ole state, the volunteer
Your proud traditions I hold dear."

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Vice Admiral William Porter Lawrence of Nashville, an American legend, a true hero of Tennessee, and the author of the State Poem, *"Oh Tennessee, My Tennessee"*; and

WHEREAS, Vice Admiral William Lawrence proudly served this nation with the utmost courage and dedication; he exemplified a lifetime of inspirational leadership, personal bravery, and loyalty to his country; and

WHEREAS, born in Nashville on January 13, 1930, William Porter Lawrence graduated first in his class at West High School, where he was President of the student body and ranking officer of the ROTC; and

WHEREAS, an outstanding athlete at West High, William Lawrence was All-City in football, All-State in basketball, a member of the state championship basketball team, state boys' tennis champion, and the recipient of the coveted William Hume Award from the Superintendent of Nashville City Schools as the high school football player deemed the "most outstanding in scholarship, leadership, sportsmanship, and value to his team"; and

WHEREAS, attending the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland, Vice Admiral Lawrence played three varsity sports, served as class president, Commander of the Brigade of Midshipmen, and graduated with distinction in 1951, ranked eighth out of seven hundred twenty-five academically; and

WHEREAS, while at Annapolis, Vice Admiral Lawrence developed the honor concept for the Brigade of Midshipmen, the present-day Brigade Honor Concept, which is a key element in Midshipman moral development; and

WHEREAS, during Vice Admiral Lawrence's days at the Academy, classmate H. Ross Perot would become a loyal fellow Midshipman; the renowned business leader would remain a steadfast and devoted friend throughout the rest of his life; and

WHEREAS, earning his wings in November of 1952, Vice Admiral William Lawrence served in the following fighter squadrons: VF-193, VF-101, VF-14, and VF-143; he served on deployments to both the Atlantic and Pacific on seven different aircraft carriers, flying twenty-five combat missions in Korea and one hundred and fifty combat missions in Vietnam; and

WHEREAS, an extraordinary pilot with razor-sharp skills, William P. Lawrence placed first in his class at Naval Test Pilot School in 1956 and was the first naval aviator to fly twice the speed of sound in a Navy plane, the F8U "Crusader III"; he also flew in the missing man formation at the funeral of President John F. Kennedy in 1963; and

WHEREAS, stationed at Patuxent River Naval Air Station in Maryland as a test pilot, Bill Lawrence was cited in renowned author James A. Michener's novel *Space* as, "perhaps the ablest...Pax River was to produce," which is high praise considering Lawrence's colleagues included future astronauts Alan Shephard, Wally Schirra, Pete Conrad, and Jim Lovell; nominated by the Navy for Project Mercury, a minor congenital heart valve problem denied Vice Admiral Lawrence his certain future as one of America's first astronauts; and

WHEREAS, Vice Admiral William P. Lawrence showed remarkable courage while serving in Vietnam. During the conflict, his jet was shot down over enemy territory and he was captured by the North Vietnamese and sent to the infamous Hoa Lo Prison, the "Hanoi Hilton"; and

WHEREAS, a source of strength to his fellow captives, which included fellow Navy pilot and future United States Senator John McCain, Vice Admiral Lawrence was the senior-ranking officer during his six years at Camp Vegas, the soldiers' official name for that prison, and was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for his courage and strength under duress; and

WHEREAS, Vice Admiral Lawrence, after a sixty-day stay in solitary confinement while a prisoner of war, composed "*Oh Tennessee, My Tennessee*," which was designated and adopted as the Official State Poem by the Eighty-Eighth Tennessee General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, after his return from Vietnam, Vice Admiral Lawrence attended the National War College, where he was designated a distinguished graduate, and earned a master's degree in international affairs at George Washington University; and

WHEREAS, continuing to serve our nation, Vice Admiral William Lawrence was then appointed to the post of Assistant Deputy Chief of Naval Operations before being named Commander of the United States Third Fleet in the Pacific; and

WHEREAS, Vice Admiral Lawrence later returned to the Naval Academy, serving as Superintendent from 1978 to 1981, a time when his daughter Wendy was among the first female graduates of the Academy; she would later become the first woman naval aviator and Naval Academy graduate to fly in space, flying three times as a mission specialist on the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's space shuttle. Vice Admiral Lawrence stated that witnessing his daughter go into space "compensates a lot for the difficult things I've faced in my life"; and

WHEREAS, following his term as Superintendent of the United States Naval Academy, Vice Admiral Lawrence worked as the Chief of Naval Personnel and, after many years of honorable service to his country, he retired from the Navy in 1986; and

WHEREAS, in honor of his courageous military service, Vice Admiral Lawrence received four Distinguished Service Medals, three Silver Stars, the Legion of Merit, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Bronze Star with Combat V, three Air Medals, the Joint Service Commendation Medal, two Purple Hearts, and the Navy Commendation with Combat V; and

WHEREAS, he continued to serve his country well after his retirement as Chair of the Naval Leadership Department, from which he advised Naval Academy staff, sculpted leadership courses and materials, and served as a guest lecturer; and

WHEREAS, President of the Association of Naval Aviation from 1991 to 1994, Vice Admiral Lawrence, dubbed the "Sailor's Admiral" by the men and women of the fleet, served as a visiting professional scholar at the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University; and

WHEREAS, no stranger to awards and accolades, Vice Admiral William P. Lawrence received the United States Naval Academy (USNA) Alumni Association's Distinguished Graduate Award in 2000; National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame's highest award, the Gold Medal; and the National Collegiate Athletic Association's highest honor, the Theodore Roosevelt Award; and

WHEREAS, Vice Admiral Lawrence also received the Navy League's Admiral Arleigh Burke Leadership Award, the State of Tennessee's Outstanding Achievement Award, the Liberty Bowl's Distinguished Service Award, the Military Chaplains Association's "Citizen of the Year" award, and the Harvard Business School Distinguished Speakers Program's "Outstanding Speaker of the Year" award; and

WHEREAS, in tribute to Vice Admiral Lawrence, the Nashville Chapter of the National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame, Inc. established in 1973 the William P. Lawrence Award, given annually to the outstanding football scholar-athlete in the city's public and private schools; and

WHEREAS, the United States Navy established in 1985 the Vice Admiral William P. Lawrence Award, a trophy given annually to the most outstanding Air Traffic Control Maintenance Technician in the Navy; and

WHEREAS, in 2005, the United States Naval Academy dedicated the Vice Admiral William P. Lawrence "N" Room at the Navy and Marine Corps Memorial Stadium in his honor, paying tribute to his contributions to the nation, the Navy, and the United States Naval Academy; and

WHEREAS, in honor of Vice Admiral Lawrence, the United States Naval Academy annually awards the Vice Admiral William P. Lawrence Ethics Essay Award and in 1982 established the Vice Admiral William P. Lawrence Award, a sword given annually to the most outstanding woman athlete at the Academy; the Lawrence family has now established the Vice Admiral William P. Lawrence Memorial Scholarship at the Academy; and

WHEREAS, listed in *Who's Who in America*, Vice Admiral Lawrence served on the Boards of Directors of several corporations and was a member of the Secretary of the Navy's Advisory Committee on History; he rendered his valuable time and energies as Vice-President of the Naval Historical Foundation, Trustee of the United States Air Force Historical Foundation,

Trustee of the Naval Aviation Museum Foundation, Director of the National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame, Consultant to the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, a member of the United States Olympic Training Center-San Diego Campaign Steering Committee, Director of the Institute for International Sport, Director of the Atlantic Council of the United States, Trustee of the Naval Academy Foundation and of the Early and Pioneer Naval Association; and

WHEREAS, William P. Lawrence is survived by his devoted wife of thirty-one years, Diane Wilcox Lawrence; three children, Navy Captain Wendy Lawrence, William Lawrence, Jr., and Dr. Laurie Lawrence; a stepson, Frederick Rauch; a brother; and five grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, *"And o'er the world as I may roam,
No place exceeds my boyhood home.
And oh how much I long to see
My native land, my Tennessee."*

WHEREAS, this General Assembly should pause to remember the singular patriotism, courage, and commitment to duty of an exceptional serviceman, public servant, and proud Tennessean, the late Vice Admiral William P. Lawrence; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Vice Admiral William Porter Lawrence and pay respectful tribute to his impeccable character, limitless courage, and stalwart commitment to his country, his beloved state of Tennessee, and his fellow man.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family and friends of Vice Admiral Lawrence.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.